

Work difficulties & study

Some ideas from the Counselling Service

We all know what it feels like to be overwhelmed at the thought of starting and completing our work! Sometimes, these difficulties can be quite paralysing. This leaflet has some ideas on how to identify the problem, get started and complete the task. Work difficulties and study blocks nearly always have an underlying emotional meaning for the individual concerned and it will help to be aware of this.

What do we mean by work difficulties and study blocks?

They include:

- difficulties in starting work (tendencies to procrastinate)
- difficulties in planning work, being overwhelmed by the task
- difficulties in doing the research – whether in starting reading or knowing when to stop
- inability to concentrate
- problems in making sense of what you've learned, feeling overwhelmed by new ideas
- difficulties to do with the finishing work – completing it and handing it in on time.

Associated with these are commonly a whole range of (interrelated) feelings and experiences. You might feel:

- to do – I don't know what to do first
- I worry about getting it right – then find I put off starting
- don't know what my tutors expect – I worry about what they'll think of my work
- I don't want to ask for help – they'll think I'm stupid
- I hate presenting my ideas in front of other students
- I can't seem to connect what I know to what is required
- I don't think I can do this any more (feeling defeated and depressed)
- I can't think – it's all a muddle
- I don't have the practical skills to do the work
- I've lost interest in the course – it's not what I thought

- I worry about failing and letting people down
- I don't think I expect to succeed – I'd be frightened of doing too well

What might help

- challenging the way you think and behave
- taking action/getting started
- accepting the realities of the situation
- understanding your own anxieties

Challenging the way you think and behave

try to recognise self defeating behaviour – the usual ways you have of putting off starting, or getting distracted

avoid all or nothing thinking, where one setback is a catastrophe

remember that **trying to get work 'perfect' can sometimes be very inhibiting**; think about aiming for 'good enough'

it can be hard to accept criticism and comment, but **try to see feedback as a constructive way of helping you to do better next time**

recognise that others may have similar feelings – it may help to talk to fellow students

Taking action, getting started

set aside a time to start – even if it takes half an hour to plan how to go about it; then start!

understand yourself as a learner – how, when and where you work best; be realistic – everyone has a maximum number of hours they can do in a day

create the right working environment, ensure that you have the necessary books and other equipment

break the task down into small sections – and then tackle one bit at a time

if you get stuck it may help to set aside your notes and plans, take a fresh piece of paper and **brainstorm – let your mind play with possible ideas** that come to you even if they don't seem relevant to begin with

if aspects of your personal life are worrying you and making it hard to concentrate try writing them down and set aside a time to think about them later; see 'Understanding your own anxieties' below

Accepting the realities of the situation

- recognise that the work will have to be done eventually, if you're going to complete your course
- recognise that it is your choice whether you do this or not
- accept that the process of planning and completing the work required at degree level is never going to be painless; taking in new ideas, thinking about them and expressing your thoughts in a coherent form can be disheartening, worrying and confusing – as well as rewarding!

Understanding your own anxieties

Difficulties in starting and completing work have complex causes and are often to do with a conflict going on in your mind. Part of you really wants to do the work, but there's an equally strong part that, for some possibly unknown reason, does not! If you feel you need help with unravelling these conflicts, or you find that serious emotional difficulties are making it impossible to work, contact the Counselling Service for an appointment.

How to contact the Counselling and Mental Health Service

Please see website for up-to-date service details:
<http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/cmh>

The UniHelp Desk will be happy to tell you where to find the Counselling service or you can contact us at:
cmh@mdx.ac.uk

LET (Learning Enhancement Team) can help with study skills and developing your written and spoken English. For more information please see: <http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/let>

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